

United States Department of Agriculture

Human Capital Plan

(FY 2003–07)

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About This Plan

The purpose of the USDA Human Capital Plan is to address the strategic management of the Department's human capital over the next 5 years. This plan identifies business drivers and internal and external factors that impact human capital planning, as well as Departmentwide improvement goals, action strategies, activity timelines, and performance measures. Mission Areas/Agencies will also be developing implementation plans to support action strategies identified in this plan, including strategies for closing specific skills gaps.

Companion documents that are referred to in the USDA Human Capital Plan include:

- Skills Gap Analysis (September 2002)
- USDA Restructuring Plan (FY2003 – 07)
- USDA Strategic Plan (FY2002 – 07)
- Accountability System Plan (December 2002)

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is in the final stages of preparing a new strategic plan that will guide its efforts for the next 5 years. The foundation for the strategic plan is the Bush Administration's Policy Report, *Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock for the New Century*, which lays out a long-term view of the Nation's agricultural and food system. Effective implementation of the new strategic plan will enable the Department to meet the challenges articulated in the policy report. Most of these challenges are new. All are multi-agency in dimension. Success depends in large part on a USDA workforce that is highly motivated, skilled, flexible, and technologically adept.

Maintaining such a workforce will be difficult given the rate of change in our food and farm system and the constraints that face us as one of the most diverse and complex agencies in the Federal Government. Many of our most critical functions, such as food safety, research, and conservation, are labor intensive, and we are predicting significant gaps in the number or skills of some of our most critical occupations. Human capital planning is critical to ensuring that the Department's workforce is capable of providing effective leadership on food, agriculture, resources, and related issues.

The Human Capital (HC) Plan establishes a framework of policies and practices that will guide our efforts in meeting these workforce needs. It contains interdependent improvement goals and action strategies that will transform how we assess, plan for, and respond proactively to our human capital challenges and needs. The plan commits USDA to the following improvement goals:

- **Strategic Alignment/Human Capital Planning:** Institute a practice of systematic human capital management that is aligned with USDA and agency strategic plans and integrated with budgets.
- **Workforce Planning and Deployment:** Institute a Departmentwide practice of conducting workforce planning that enables the Department and our agencies to efficiently and effectively deploy the workforce, as well as prevent skills gaps.
- **Accountability System:** Ensure that USDA human resources programs are strategically aligned, effective, efficient, and in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and the President's Management Agenda (PMA) using a Departmentwide accountability system.
- **Talent Management:** Align recruitment and retention strategies with workforce planning efforts to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts and close critical position and competency gaps.
- **Leadership Development and Succession Planning:** Ensure leadership continuity and development through workforce planning and analysis, and optimal use of available tools and resources throughout the Department, in order to better achieve mission requirements.

- **Knowledge Management and Employee Development:** Ensure that USDA captures and shares knowledge, and develops employee competence to better perform the Department's mission.
- **Performance Management:** Ensure the performance appraisal system is aligned with Departmental/organization mission accomplishment and is linked to employee development and recognition programs, ultimately improving individual and organizational performance.
- **Diversity Management, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), and Civil Rights:** Ensure a diverse workforce with the necessary skills to accomplish the USDA mission and strategic goals.
- **Labor and Employee Relations and Conflict Management:** Prevent and successfully resolve employee disputes and maintain effective working relationships with labor organizations.

These improvement goals are supported by action strategies, milestones, and key performance measures in Appendix A. Potential Civil Rights impacts on the workforce were also monitored as the plan was developed, and the Department's Civil Rights policies are included in Appendix B.

The USDA HC Plan is: a single source for performance expectations, timelines, and measures for meeting the human capital goals within the Department; a mechanism to respond to OPM and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regarding progress toward meeting human capital goals; and a vehicle to examine and ensure more business efficiencies and cross-agency collaboration. The plan is a living document that will be reviewed regularly to ensure its effectiveness in maintaining a workforce capable of confronting and managing the changes in our farm and food system.

2.0 MESSAGE FROM THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION

I am pleased to present the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Human Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2003–2007. USDA has developed this plan to help carry out our mission, serve our customers, and invest in our current and future workforce. This plan ensures that our people can conduct day-to-day operations effectively and responsively, yet it positions us as a Department to achieve longer-term strategic goals and objectives.

We face several human capital challenges now and in the future. In the next five years, we anticipate an unprecedented number of executives and managers will retire, challenging our ability to lead and manage our agencies. Our workforce must be skilled and trained in new ways of doing business to respond to continuing threats to our nation's homeland security. Our customers expect world-class service from us that require us to be collaborative and integrated in our thinking, and to share information better and faster. We recognize that our competitive advantage in the U.S. food and agricultural sector depends on attracting, developing, and retaining top talent in crucial scientific fields. Likewise, we have a special need to maintain a strong civil rights program within the Department that communicates and reinforces the importance of our rich, diverse culture and invites inclusiveness.

To successfully implement our Human Capital Plan, we have built a solid supporting infrastructure of planning, communication, collaboration, and accountability – that will help us to build and sustain our Human Capital Plan. We have outlined clear roles and responsibilities to carry out the plan. Success will be achieved through all levels and many avenues, including our executive leadership, human resources staff, mission areas/agency personnel offices, agency managers, employees, and our unions.

In response to the challenges we face, we have identified over 60 human capital action strategies, both at the Department and agency levels, that will help us excel as an organization and to serve our customers well. Some of these initiatives include aligning human resources systems with USDA's strategic goals and mission, creating forums for sharing best practices across agencies, and developing models and tools for agencies. I invite you to review all of the initiatives contained in this plan and see how we will ensure that we have the talent necessary to carry out the programs, and provide an environment where each employee can perform to his or her potential and be recognized for their success.

President Bush issued his Management Agenda in FY2002, which outlined a strategy for improving the management and performance of all Federal Departments and agencies. This management agenda seeks to make continual and lasting improvements in five key areas, including the Strategic Management of Human Capital. While this plan addresses the *Strategic Management of Human Capital* goal most directly, we developed the plan to impact and contribute to success in the other key areas such as Competitive Sourcing and e-Government.

Finally, our Human Capital Plan links to the USDA Strategic Plan (FY2002-07) and aligns its approaches and outcomes with the Department's overall mission, vision, and the values set forth by the Administration. This level of attention to human capital planning over the next five years



will help USDA manage human capital and workforce planning initiatives in order to present our intentions for action and results to Congress, other stakeholders, and the public at large. Through these efforts, we will also be able to illustrate the link between human capital and the Administration's policy and management objectives.

The USDA Human Capital Plan is a dynamic document that will be modified as appropriate in view of changes in the farm economy, evolving Homeland Security and technology priorities, and other external factors. It provides the flexibility we need to ready our human resources well into the future to meet these changes.

We look forward to working closely with USDA's partners, stakeholders, and associates to support the initiatives and to achieve the results outlined in this Human Capital Plan.

Lou Gallegos
Assistant Secretary For Administration

3.0 OVERVIEW OF USDA'S GOALS AND WORKFORCE

3.1 USDA'S STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

USDA's HC Plan was designed to institute policies and practices that will ensure USDA has a workforce capable of carrying out the Department's new Strategic Plan for FY2002–07. To put the HC Plan in context, we provide the mission, vision, values, strategic goals, and key outcomes from the plan, below.

Our Mission: We provide leadership on food, agriculture, resource, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management.

Our Vision: To be recognized as a dynamic and effective organization.

Our Values: Our values are based on the bedrock values that were articulated by President George W. Bush to Federal employees on November 19, 2001. President Bush said:

- “First, we must always maintain the highest ethical standards. In addition to asking, ‘what is legal?’ we must also ask, ‘what is right?’”
- We must confront the tough problems, not avoid them. We are here to serve the public's long-term interests, not just to apply quick, short-term fixes.
- We must remember that political and career employees are part of the same team. The American people do not distinguish between them, and neither do I. The American people and I have high expectations for our entire Government. To meet those expectations, we need to work together.
- Finally, we should always remember that every dollar we spend is the taxpayers' money. People worked hard to earn it, and we should spend it wisely and reluctantly.”

Strategic Goals and Outcomes

Goal 1: Enhance economic opportunities for agricultural producers.

- Expand international marketing opportunities.
- Support international economic development and trade capacity building.
- Expand alternative uses for agricultural products.
- Provide risk management and financing tools for farmers and ranchers.

Goal 2: Support increased economic opportunities and improved quality of life in rural America.

- Expand job opportunities through USDA financing of businesses.
- Support the provision of quality housing and modern community facilities.
- Support modern and affordable facilities.

Goal 3: Enhance protection and safety of the Nation's agriculture and food supply.

- Reduce the incidence of foodborne illness related to meat, poultry, and egg products in the U.S.
- Reduce the number and severity of agricultural pest and disease outbreaks.

Goal 4: Improve the Nation's nutrition and health.

- Improve access to nutritious food for resource limited people.
- Promote healthier eating habits and lifestyles.
- Improve food program management and customer service.

Goal 5: Protect and enhance the Nation's natural resource base and environment.

- Implement the President's Healthy Forest Initiative and other actions to improve management of public lands.
- Improve management of private lands.

3.2 PROGRAM AND WORKFORCE OVERVIEW

USDA is organized into seven mission areas that reflect the Department's diversity: Natural Resources and the Environment; Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services; Rural Development; Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services; Food Safety; Research, Education, and Economics; and Marketing and Regulatory Programs. The mission areas have a variety of responsibilities to the American people, including the following:

- USDA facilitates the domestic and international marketing of U.S. agricultural products and protects America's animal and plant resources.
- USDA is responsible for improving health through a safe and secure food supply.
- USDA leads the Federal anti-hunger effort with the Food Stamp, School Lunch, School Breakfast, and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs.
- USDA is the steward of our Nation's 192 million acres of national forests and rangelands.
- USDA brings housing, modern telecommunications, and safe drinking water to rural America.
- USDA is a research leader in everything from human nutrition to new crop technologies that allow us to grow more food and fiber using less water and pesticides.

- USDA helps ensure open markets for U.S. agricultural products and provides food aid to needy people overseas.
- USDA works closely with the national agricultural research, extension, and higher education system to promote education on agricultural issues.
- USDA provides the official crop and livestock production, economic, and environmental data that is used to manage our national agricultural production.

The approximately 100,000 individuals who make up USDA's permanent, temporary, seasonal, and intermittent workforce and approximately 11,500 non-Federal county office employees make it possible for USDA to carry out missions and programs vital to the American people. The breadth of USDA's missions and programs results in a very diverse workforce in terms of demographics and skills and an extensive field structure that enables USDA to provide services directly to our customers. More than 90 percent of USDA's employees work outside of the Washington, DC, area. Following is a statistical snapshot of our workforce:

- The average age among USDA employees is 44 and more than one-third of USDA employees are over 50 years old. Almost half of the Food Safety mission area employees are 50 years or older.
- About 40 percent of our current workforce is expected to retire in the next 10 years.
- The average length of service is 14 years.
- There are fewer younger workers entering the replacement pipeline, with about 8.8 percent of USDA's workforce under age 30. Only 5 percent of the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services and Rural Development mission areas' workforce is under 30.
- The average grade of USDA employees is GS-9. Approximately 45 percent of employees are in grades GS-9 through GS-12. However, projected retirements among GS-7 and GS-9 employees over the next decade suggest a potential replacement shortfall for retiring higher grade employees.
- There is an average of one USDA supervisor to every eight employees. Not included in this ratio are approximately 11,500 non-Federal, county-based employees. When those employees are included, the ratio grows to about one supervisor for every nine employees.

USDA's workforce also reflects recent and significant streamlining and de-layering efforts. USDA initiated a major Departmentwide streamlining effort in 1992 that ultimately reduced the number of headquarters organizations by 25 percent and the number of county offices by one-third. This effort has resulted in a 28 percent decline in the number of supervisors and similar reductions in administrative staff. In addition, many USDA agencies have undertaken specific initiatives to streamline their program delivery and/or administrative structures to improve service delivery. Limited budgets, effective use of technology, and competitive sourcing have also constrained USDA's staffing levels.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of USDA's workforce is its occupational diversity; USDA employs individuals in over 340 different occupations. Over 43.9 percent of the Department's permanent workforce is concentrated in the following 5 occupations: forestry and forestry technician (12 percent), food and safety inspection (11.3 percent), life sciences (10 percent), soil conservation (6 percent), and loan specialist (4.6 percent).

While the Department's mission requires a variety of skills and knowledge, the most common critical skills are:

Technical expertise in scientific and engineering disciplines. USDA is largely a science-based agency. In addition to advanced scientific research in agriculture, biotechnology, and forestry, USDA conducts inspections that require college degrees or college course work in the biological sciences. Veterinarians are currently critical to meeting growing demands for food safety inspections and animal health protection. More of our food safety inspectors will be required to have additional education and training in microbiology. Engineers and engineering technicians are vital to the discovery and application of new techniques and technologies that promote better natural resource management and more efficient and reliable ways to grade and inspect food for market.

Knowledge of economics. USDA relies on economists and related disciplines to develop and evaluate legislative, regulatory, and policy options. Knowledge of agricultural commodities, credit principles, financial analysis, production, marketing, and trade issues is vital.

Information Technology (IT) skills. IT skills are critical as the Department and its customers increasingly rely upon new technology to perform their work. eGovernment and eCommerce will change the way work is accomplished.

The Department recently conducted a skills gap analysis to determine where potential shortfalls in staffing might exist. Twenty-one mission-critical occupations were identified and projections were made of the number and skills of employees in these jobs over the next 5 years. This analysis found significant gaps may occur in the following occupational areas by 2007:

- Consumer Safety Officer
- Plant Protection and Quarantine Officers
- Forestry
- Biological Science
- Loan Specialists
- Administration and Program Management

The Department is already taking steps to respond to these projected gaps, and this HC Plan was designed to provide the broad framework needed to develop specific steps to ensure that highly skilled personnel will be available in these mission-critical areas in the years to come.

3.3 EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DRIVERS

The HC Plan must support our most important resource: our people. To do this, it is critical that we conduct a regular strategic assessment of our business environment. Our current strategic planning and restructuring efforts indicate a variety of external and internal drivers that impact human capital planning. These considerations are provided below.

External Drivers

- Changing citizen expectations of the Government's role, including more collaboration and citizen involvement
- The heightened national focus on Homeland Security since September 11, 2001
- Citizen and congressional interest focused on civil rights issues
- The Government Performance and Results Act

Internal Drivers

- A significant loss of leadership and management skills due to a projected high rate of Senior Executive Service (SES) employees eligible for retirement and the reduced pipeline of replacements
- A projected inventory gap (i.e., number of staff available) in 14 mission critical positions
- A Departmentwide focus on the Bush Administration's Policy Report, *Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock for the New Century*
- Implementation of major policy initiatives, such as the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 and the National Fire Plan, which involve tight deadlines and close coordination
- The USDA Strategic Plan and eGovernment Strategic Plan
- The decentralized environment of USDA and its human resources—with agencies in varying stages of human capital and workforce planning
- A decade of downsizing and associated reductions in the influx of new knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Shift to corporate IT systems and other automation to better support Department performance
- Greater emphasis on promoting a knowledge-sharing culture throughout the Department
- Continued emphasis on civil rights in program delivery

These external and internal drivers help to reinforce the types of human capital initiatives that must be in place to ensure that we have the right number and skill mix of employees in our workforce. They also help to demonstrate the impact of technology on the types of skills we

need and how our work can be performed more efficiently and with more customer responsiveness.

3.4 CROSSCUTTING MISSION DRIVERS

It is clear that several crosscutting issues will drive the Department's mission activities and delivery, and significantly impact human capital management over the next 5 years. These mission drivers are detailed below.

Global Markets

Globalization of markets and culture has enormous implications for the food and agricultural system and those who work in it. We can no longer think of U.S. agriculture as being confined to what takes place within our Nation's borders. It is critical that USDA employees see this bigger picture and understand how to structure and implement USDA programs to recognize the challenges and opportunities presented by the global market.

Cutting-Edge Scientific Research

The competitive future of the U.S. food and agricultural sector depends on a continuing flow of cutting-edge scientific research and analysis. Discovery and applied research in biotechnology and genomics lay the foundation for meeting the challenges of global food security. Genetics and molecular biology hold promise to reduce recurring problems of plant and animal disease, invasive species, post-harvest losses, and food-related problems with human health. Developing commercially feasible renewable resources, food-based health products, and manufacturing products creates new demand for agricultural products and helps reduce dependence on foreign sources of non-renewable resources. To meet these scientific challenges, USDA must be prepared to educate, recruit, and retain top talent in these critical scientific disciplines.

Homeland Security

Increased emphasis on homeland security also affects USDA's workforce decisions. The USDA has a unique and critical role in helping to protect against threats to farms, ranches, and the American food supply. An ever-increasing emphasis on food safety, physical security, and border security will affect how we recruit, train, and deploy our workforce.

Farm Security and Rural Investment Act Implementation

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 requires faster, more efficient, and accurate services to farmers, ranchers, and other stakeholders. The Department is under intense congressional scrutiny to implement almost 500 actions included in the Act in record timeframes. The actions include major policy and program development as well as program implementation. To carry out the programs authorized by the Act, USDA needs to have capable and well-trained staff that can quickly develop policy and programs, implement these programs, and adapt to leading these new programs. In addition, this will require improvements in a variety of skills among USDA staff. In addition, USDA will need to provide a more integrated service delivery

approach that will require unprecedented levels of collaboration and information sharing among our agencies to improve customer service.

3.5 USDA HUMAN CAPITAL IMPERATIVES

By addressing these drivers, and the USDA Strategic Plan, we developed the following human capital imperatives:

- To ensure we are able to meet our strategic goals, the Department and our agencies must lay the foundation for effective human capital management through consistent and ongoing human capital and workforce planning efforts. Particularly important is the integration of human capital efforts across our agencies to better support Departmentwide goals.
- To minimize the impact of leadership attrition and to respond to new program leadership competency requirements, we must focus on leadership development and succession planning activities.
- To meet mission goals that demand cutting-edge research, we must develop education, recruitment, and retention strategies to attract scientists, consumer safety officers, forestry technicians, and experts in other specialty occupations, as mentioned earlier, to the Department and to keep USDA as a leader in world-class research.
- To ensure that USDA improves its citizen-centered structure and the President's goals of a market-based, results-oriented government, we must ensure collaboration between human capital efforts and other Department and agency PMA leaders. We will incorporate the Competitive Sourcing, eGovernment, Financial Management, and Budget and Performance Integration initiatives in our workforce planning activities.
- To ensure an agile and effective workforce, we must undertake training and culture change efforts. Areas of focus include—
 - Improving technology skills across the board to enable the use of existing information systems for better program delivery
 - Improving customer service through customer service training and eliminating administrative program redundancies to provide better program integration
 - Improving our managers' business skills
- To support a wider scope of responsibilities, we must be able to provide the appropriate human capital solutions. These may include capitalizing on economies of scale in recruiting efforts, retraining staff undergoing program shifts, and assisting staff and managers in accomplishing greater program responsibilities with fewer staff.

4.0 HUMAN CAPITAL PLAN STRUCTURE

Strategic management of human capital is necessary to ensure that USDA's human resources are effectively utilized, and that they support the Department's vision and mission. This plan is intended to be flexible enough to accommodate circumstances not only as they are today, but also as they will unfold in the future. Although it is a roadmap that will enable USDA to accomplish its human capital goals over the 5 years, we expect to adjust the plan as we proceed.

4.1 APPROACH

In August 2002, USDA established a team of human resources professionals from the Department and each of its mission areas and agencies, as well as other PMA leaders, to develop a human capital plan. With senior program manager input and review, the HC team first defined USDA's human capital imperatives based on an analysis of the USDA Strategic Plan, crosscutting mission drivers, and internal and external drivers. The HC team developed USDA's human capital goals by reviewing the imperatives in combination with Departmentwide and agency-specific progress assessments. In particular, we developed our goals with respect to the six standards of OPM's Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework, which is a resource used across the Federal Government that defines and operationalizes standards and initiatives for human capital performance. In addition, we reviewed and incorporated human capital best practices to develop the plan. The team developed action strategies, priorities, milestones, and key measures to guide the Department in achieving the human capital goals. Potential civil rights impacts on the workforce were also monitored as the team developed the plan.

The human capital team identified several key characteristics for USDA's plan. These include—

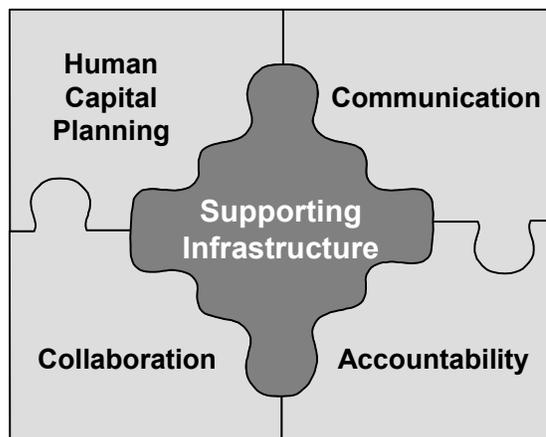
- The Department's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) will play a leadership role in the human capital planning effort. Some instances of OHRM's leadership include—
 - Developing standardized guidelines and training for agencies in human capital planning and workforce planning
 - Developing and promoting Departmentwide policy that supports accomplishing human capital goals
 - Facilitating forums to share information and best practices across the Department.
- Action strategies for the agencies will be in the form of "corporate standards." These standards will establish a baseline of minimum performance that all USDA agencies must meet while allowing flexibility to create systems that address unique agency needs.
- The USDA HC Plan is a living document that will be updated on a regular basis. This updating and recalibration process will help to ensure alignment with the Department's evolving Strategic Plan, Departmental PMA initiatives' progress, and other major changes.
- The USDA HC Plan is also a single source for performance expectations, timelines, and measures for meeting the human capital goals within the Department, a mechanism to

respond to OPM and OMB regarding progress toward meeting human capital goals, and a vehicle to examine and ensure more business efficiencies and reduction of redundant human capital systems.

4.2 SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

USDA identified four management systems that are critical for building and, more importantly, sustaining the human capital effort. The Department’s OHRM will champion these four systems: Human Capital Planning, Communication, Collaboration, and Accountability.

- Human Capital Planning**—USDA’s HC Plan is linked to the Department’s Strategic Plan and mission. The HC Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis and may be adjusted to ensure continued alignment. In addition, all USDA agencies will institute a practice of human capital planning as a part of their agency management practices. They will also be responsive to any new or shifting external drivers.
- Communication**—USDA has developed and will implement a comprehensive communications strategy that ensures all internal stakeholders understand the Department’s HC Plan, including their roles and responsibilities related to it, and will provide regular progress reports to external and internal stakeholders.
- Collaboration**—USDA will foster an environment of learning, innovation, and collaboration regarding human capital efforts. OHRM will collaborate with leaders in other USDA PMA areas; establish a forum to share best practices and practical implementation strategies. USDA will continue utilizing the HC team and other working groups to ensure efficient, high-quality human capital programs that are responsive to the unique situations of the diverse agencies that make up the Department.
- Accountability**—USDA will establish a system to measure the Department’s progress toward achieving and effectiveness of, human capital goals. In addition, the system will be used to identify and correct human capital problems and issues as they arise, provide self-assessment tools and regular reporting schedules for agencies, and provide mechanisms to hold executives, managers, human capital professionals, and employees accountable through performance management and other systems.



4.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To successfully implement USDA’s HC Plan, everyone, from the Secretary to front-line employees, must be committed to the plan and its goals. Senior leadership will need to communicate their commitment to human capital and achieving the human capital goals. In addition, they must provide support by incorporating human capital into their performance plans and ensuring resources are allocated to the efforts. OHRM will take the lead in updating the HC Plan, facilitating coordination and collaboration among agencies, developing and implementing the communication strategy, and managing the accountability system. Agency human resources offices are responsible for implementing human capital plans and actions within their agencies and must participate in Departmentwide and lead agency planning, communication, and reporting. Through communication efforts, employees should be able to identify their roles in the HC Plan and provide feedback. The following table outlines roles and responsibilities in more detail.

Table 4-1. Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

Secretary and Subcabinet Executives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain commitment to the HC Plan, and communicate that commitment • Provide leadership attention to accountability for implementation of the HC Plan, and resource prioritization and allocation for human capital efforts
PMA Executive Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance and direction for the human capital planning effort • Communicate human capital progress internally and externally • Ensure coordination among USDA PMA initiatives
USDA Office of Human Resources Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Departmentwide human capital policy development and oversight • Provide standardized guidelines and training for agencies in human capital planning and workforce planning • Provide a mechanism for coordination and collaboration with all agencies; facilitating the gathering of and sharing of innovative practices • Manage accountability for the Department’s progress • Lead the effort to maintain and update the plan • Lead the Departmentwide communication strategy • Report to Secretary, OMB, and OPM
Mission Area/ Agency Human Resources Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the development of the HC Plan and agency-specific initiatives • Implement human capital strategies and actions within their agencies • Communicate HC Plan elements to management and employees • Report on agency progress toward achieving the HC Plan’s goals • Identify potential impediments and opportunities for achieving the HC Plan’s goals
Agency Executives and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate PMA initiatives (including human capital) into agency business plans • Participate in the development of human capital plans/initiatives • Demonstrate commitment, support, and leadership, and allocate resources
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify their link to human capital efforts via agency communication; provide feedback and share information and knowledge
Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate with agency management to identify and resolve issues related to action strategy implementation through collaborative efforts and/or collective bargaining

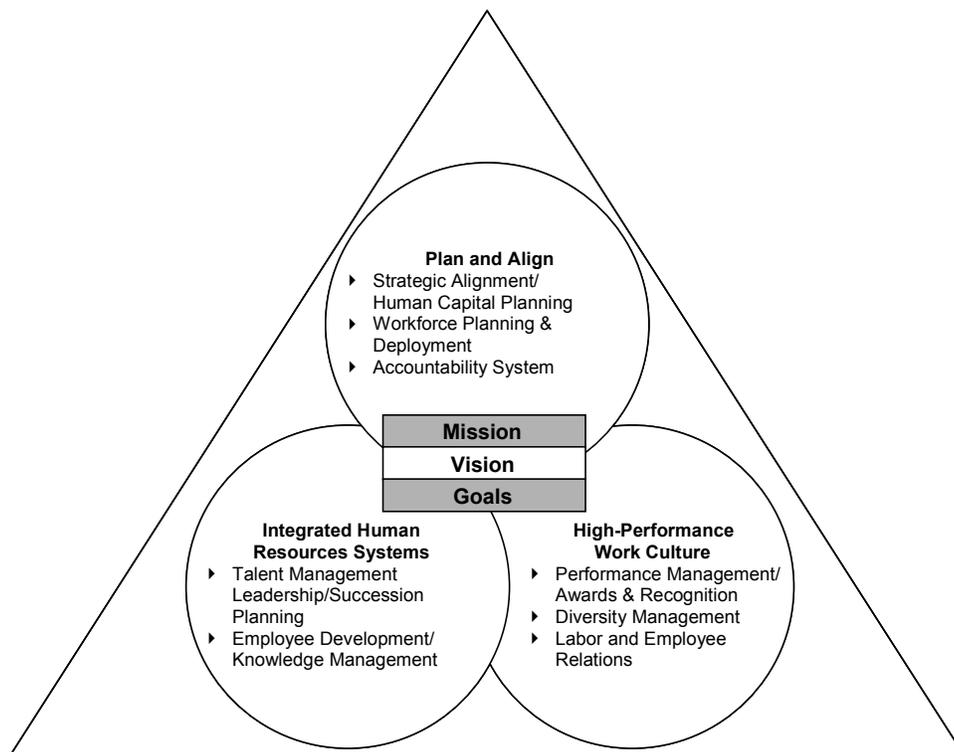
5.0 HUMAN CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT GOALS AND STRATEGIES

USDA is improving the way we manage our human capital in order to ensure that we meet the challenges of the 21st century. In partnership with our customers, we will create innovative human resources solutions for today's business needs and tomorrow's challenges. USDA already has in place a wide variety of programs, initiatives, activities, and tools to address issues related to the recruitment, development, and retention of the workforce. While this HC Plan addresses a variety of areas for improvement, it focuses on better alignment of human capital programs with the Department's strategic goals and missions. In addition, USDA will facilitate forums to share best practices and lessons learned, as well as serving as a central resource for that information. Finally, we will work to provide more standardized models and tools to our agencies in all human capital areas.

5.1 USDA HUMAN CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

USDA has created an integrated human capital framework that is strategically aligned with our mission, vision, and goals, as shown in figure 5-1. Our system has three key components: Conducting Strategic Planning and Alignment, Implementing Integrated Human Resources Systems, and Creating a High-Performance Work Culture. When properly implemented, our human capital system will enable, motivate, and inspire our workforce to meet our Department's mission, vision, and key goals.

Figure 5-1: USDA Human Capital Framework



First, we will build a solid human capital foundation that includes careful human capital and workforce planning, strategic alignment, an accountability system, and effective workforce deployment. Also key to our success are the design and promotion of a new organizational communication and collaboration model. With the human resources structure in place, we can then begin to design and implement integrated human resources systems, such as recruitment and retention, employee development and knowledge management, and leadership and succession planning. Efficient and effective human resources programs will help support a high-performance work culture. Attention will also focus on improving programs and systems in performance management, diversity, and labor and employee relations. This integrated human capital framework will serve as a beacon to guide our agencies in their human capital planning and program development efforts.

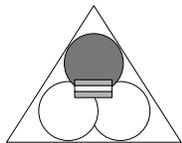
USDA's human capital strategy includes the key elements outlined in our Human Capital Framework: Strategic Alignment and Human Capital Planning; Workforce Planning and Deployment; Accountability System; Talent Management; Leadership and Succession Planning; Knowledge Management and Employee Development; Performance Management; Diversity Management, EEO, and Civil Rights; and Labor and Employee Relations and Conflict Management. For each element in our plan, we present and discuss the following:

- Current initiatives supporting the human capital element
- Improvement goal(s)
- Future action strategies, timelines, and measures to assess progress toward goal attainment.

The HC implementation plan is included in Appendix A.

USDA's integrated framework is depicted before each element discussion, serving as a legend that references the human capital component of the framework that is being addressed: Conducting Strategic Planning and Alignment, Implementing Integrated Human Resources Systems, and Creating a High-Performance Work Culture.

5.1.1 Strategic Alignment and Human Capital Planning



Prior to this HC Plan, USDA's OHRM developed a Human Resources Strategic Plan collaboratively with input from the Human Resources Leadership Council (HRLC). The HRLC, which consists of the Mission Area Personnel Officers and the other OHRM Division Directors, meets once a month to discuss and plan Departmentwide human capital initiatives, as set forth in the HC Plan. This human capital planning process builds upon and expands the HRLC's original plan.

Some of our agencies have their own Human Resources Strategic Plans or human capital goals embedded in their strategic plans or workforce plans. However, other agencies employ limited human capital planning and are awaiting direction from the Department. As described in Section 4, USDA now has a framework for human capital planning that agencies can use as they move forward in developing their own human capital strategy.

The USDA relies on focus groups, special studies conducted by outside sources, and the Government-Wide Survey (GWS) to obtain feedback from the workforce on human capital issues. However, two agencies have been able to share lessons learned from their own human capital programs—the Forest Service, which is piloting an effort, and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), which implemented a program several years ago. The NASS has integrated its program into its normal business processes and has made changes to its awards program, career path plans, and employee development plans based on the results. For the past several years, the Forest Service has conducted periodic organizational climate surveys, communicated to employees about the feedback received, and made changes in employee programs where it made good business sense. One key component of USDA's human capital planning process will be forums to share lessons learned and best practices across agencies.

Most of our agencies' human resources staffs have limited involvement in strategic planning efforts. Most have the appropriate number of workers, but they do not necessarily have the required human resources consultation and business acumen competencies. Strategies for developing occupation-specific competencies will be incorporated into performance management and training programs. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) recognized this need and has begun implementing customer service and consultative skills training. In 2000, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) established customer service training requirements and customer service standards. The ARS initiative began in Human Resources and is now being expanded into other organizations within the agency. Other lessons learned will be collected and shared with the Department and other agencies.

Improvement Goal 1:

Institute a practice of systematic human capital management that is aligned with the USDA and agency strategic plans, and integrated with budgets.

Action Strategies:

Department/Office of Human Resources Management

- Review and help Mission Areas/Agencies develop their human capital plans.
- OHRM will use the HC Plan to set priorities for resource allocations and funding requests.
- Implement a Human Capital Communication Strategy to ensure stakeholder participation in and understanding of their responsibilities related to the HC Plan.
- Hold regular forums for continuous human capital learning, sharing best practices among the agencies, and hosting skill-building workshops in order to build a capacity in all

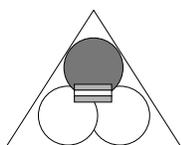
human capital framework areas, starting with developing effective agency human capital plans and conducting workforce planning.

- Promote an environment of collaboration across the agencies; operational practitioner working groups will meet regularly (e.g., monthly or quarterly) to share best practices, exchange ideas, and build skills in all human capital areas.
- Establish a Web site for information sharing in all human capital framework areas.
- Work with key stakeholders (e.g., agencies, PMA leaders, program managers) to review and update the USDA HC Plan annually.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

- Develop (i.e., either by developing a unique agency plan or adopting and modifying the Department’s HC Plan) and begin implementing a human capital plan that includes a communications component. The agency plans should be developed by Human Resources in collaboration with agency leaders and managers and integrated with agency strategic plans to identify mission-critical and human capital issues.
- Align human capital plan elements with agency strategic plan/annual performance plans.
- Set priorities for resources and funding in accordance with the agency human capital plan.
- Participate in Departmentwide collaboration efforts by providing representatives for working groups and forums, and sharing best practices.

5.1.2 Workforce Planning and Deployment



In September 2002, as part of the Skills Gap Analysis, USDA conducted a preliminary assessment of its 21 most critical occupational series that represent 57 percent of our permanent workforce. This assessment was based on population, mission criticality, recruiting difficulty, and homeland security responsibilities. The assessment included an inventory of staff required in each of these occupational series and the inventory of assigned staff. For each of the critical occupational series, the gaps were forecasted based on historical accession and separation rates. The anticipated gaps over the next 5 years were then analyzed and reported. We found that 14 of 21 occupations have a projected inventory gap.

Considering historical accessions, the occupational series with the largest inventory gap by FY2007 is Loan Specialist (GS-1165 series). There is a projected shortage of more than 800 positions. We also project large inventory gaps in plant protection and quarantine officers (GS-0436), consumer safety inspection (GS-1862 series), soil conservation (GS-0457 series), general biological science (GS-0401 series), and forestry (GS-0460 series).

The occupation-specific competency gaps are unique to each series. However, the largest percentage of occupation-specific competency gaps projected is for the dietician and nutritionist

series (GS-0630). The groups project large gaps in knowledge of bio-statistics, epidemiology, physiology, genetics, and physical activity guidelines.

Based on data from the September 2002 Skills Gap Analysis, more than one-third of USDA employees are over 50 years old. An average of 3.6 percent of USDA employees are expected to retire in each of the next 5 years, with increasing numbers projected for each year. A “normal” level of retirement is considered to be approximately 2.33 percent annually. In light of these retirement figures and other human capital imperatives, USDA is taking a more aggressive approach with regard to workforce planning.

Some of our agencies are working to combat the projected skills losses by developing their own workforce planning tools. For example, NRCS is developing a Skills Information Management System (SIMS). SIMS is designed as a comprehensive analysis and management system to provide critical skills gap information to support workforce-planning decisions. It will provide agency leaders with the tools necessary to evaluate the agency’s workforce and assess technical capabilities at all levels to ensure that the agency has a trained and skilled workforce ready to engage in new activities to achieve the agency’s mission. Products include proficiency models, core curricula, and training plans. Other agencies with successful programs include the Forest Service, which uses its workforce plan to drive recruitment, training, and succession planning efforts; the Farm Service Agency (FSA), which conducts bench-strength studies for its future organizational needs; and Rural Development (RD), which provides managers with data to conduct an analysis of current and future workforce needs on an individual basis.

While some agencies are at the forefront of workforce planning, others need more guidance for developing their own workforce plans. There is no consistent USDA model for workforce planning, and it is important that all our agencies consider certain factors when conducting workforce planning (e.g., competitive sourcing). USDA needs to focus on sharing and promoting best practices in workforce planning across the agencies. In addition, it is important to provide agencies with an automated workforce planning tool. The Department may be able to capitalize on the workforce planning functionality of the proposed learning management system, as described in the Knowledge Management and Employee Development section.

In December 2001, the Department initiated a comprehensive workforce restructuring effort for the Service Center agencies: FSA, NRCS, and the RD mission area. The workforce restructuring plan provides specific action items, timelines, and responsibilities in order to achieve a more efficient, streamlined, and citizen-centered organization. Staffing at all levels, including administrative and headquarters staff, has been reduced while the volume and complexity of the programs has increased greatly. New programs have been added to the agencies’ portfolios, increasing workload without corresponding increases in staffing levels. The Department is currently in the process of updating its Workforce Restructuring Plan. Workforce restructuring plans are detailed in a document separate from the HC Plan.

Improvement Goal 2:

Institute a Departmentwide practice of conducting workforce planning that enables the Department and our agencies to efficiently and effectively deploy the workforce, as well as prevent skills gaps.

Action Strategies:

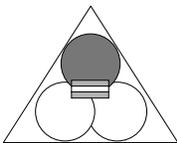
Department/Office of Human Resources Management

- Conduct Departmentwide workforce planning and update annually.
- Establish a Department model for workforce planning that addresses competency definition/management, projected workforce imbalances and skills gaps, workload analysis, reviews of organizational layers, competitive sourcing, mission-critical areas, and recruitment and retention strategies.
- Develop an enterprise-wide Web-based workforce planning system that enables information retrieval by those outside OHRM.
- Review agency workforce restructuring plans for completeness and consistency with Department policy.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

- Agency leadership and human resources staff collaborate to conduct workforce planning using the Departmentwide model.
- Develop and implement workforce restructuring plans, with program manager involvement, that incorporate competitive sourcing solutions and resource savings related to eGovernment efficiencies.
- Provide updates to the Department on restructuring plans.

5.1.3 Accountability System



While several of USDA's agencies have a long history of conducting human resources management evaluations on a regularly occurring cycle (e.g., RD, NASS, and NRCS), others have primarily partnered with OPM to conduct joint reviews. Recent Department-level evaluations have focused on specific issue areas rather than taken a comprehensive look at human capital. Even though selected human resources data and statistics are shared with agency human resources officers, the Department's goal is to improve data distribution.

USDA believes the development of the HC Plan, along with goals, action strategies, timelines, and measures tied to Department strategy, is the first step in developing a comprehensive, standardized Departmentwide accountability program. It is important to fully address effectiveness, efficiency, and compliance with applicable rules and regulations. We will utilize an agency team to develop a comprehensive accountability system that follows OPM guidance, establishes standards, and provides useful assessment tools for agencies. Two USDA agencies, ARS and FSIS, have already identified key human resources services and establish qualitative and quantitative customer service standards.

OPM's June 2002 Oversight Review indicated that USDA supervisors and employees are more familiar with merit system principles and prohibited personnel practices than most Federal workers. USDA and our agencies have training available on merit system principles and prohibited personnel practices, but we can do more at the agency level to hold managers and supervisors accountable for merit-based human resources management (HRM) decisions. One step in that direction is the new SES performance management system with a human capital component. This new system holds each SES member specifically accountable for each of the PMA items, including Strategic Management of Human Capital and protections based on the Merit System Principles.

Improvement Goal 3:

Ensure that USDA human resources programs are strategically aligned, effective, efficient, and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (e.g., Veteran's Preference, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Merit System Principles) and the PMA using a Departmentwide accountability system.

Action Strategies:

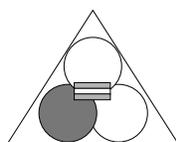
Department/Office of Human Resources Management

- Facilitate the development of a standardized USDA HRM Accountability Program based on the OPM Accountability System that—
 - Uses an agency team to define accountability and develop short- and long-term plans
 - Ensures a consistent approach
 - Provides user-friendly, cost-effective tools for agencies
 - Institutionalizes a results-oriented, data-driven system with key indicators/standards
 - Identifies information to measure and creates a checklist for agencies
 - Includes an annual assessment of effectiveness.
- Assess Department and agency human capital progress using a results-oriented reporting system that is part of the USDA HRM Accountability Program.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies:

- Participate in the development of USDA's HRM Accountability Program.
- Systematically evaluate agency programs using processes, tools, and schedules contained in the USDA Accountability Program.
- Provide quarterly reports via the HC Plan reporting system on progress toward USDA Accountability Program goals and actions (once the reporting system is developed).

5.1.4 Talent Management



As previously mentioned, the Departmentwide Skills Gap Analysis is assisting USDA in identifying critical skills and mission-critical occupations. Some

agencies have successful recruitment plans that are based on data from their workforce plans. The Forest Service workforce plan contains some staffing forecasting. The NRCS employs a comprehensive workforce forecasting model to predict competencies and recruitment needs. However, agencies need to conduct more effective forecasting of future needs and to be able to link agency recruitment and retention programs to workforce planning and skills gap analyses. In addition, some managers have been very involved in recruitment programs, but more involvement is needed.

There is a need for a consistent approach in the way USDA agencies market on college campuses. Students are not aware of all the programs with which USDA is involved and those college majors for which USDA recruits. USDA recruitment should include a national approach that incorporates both Departmental and agency perspectives. The Department's current recruitment campaign includes a corporate brochure that must be supplemented with specific information materials from each agency. NRCS developed a recruitment strategy using a specific employment brand (*You Can Make A Difference: Local People, Global Mission*) on all recruitment materials (which are also translated into Spanish.) RD's recruiting CD, *USDA and You, Career Opportunities in Rural Development*, which provides compensation and benefits information, steps to follow in applying for a position, and explains hiring programs, is one example of another useful tool for campus and other types of recruiting. In addition, USDA was one of the key Federal agencies to develop and participate in the first-ever Federal Virtual IT Job Fair.

USDA plans to make greater use of flexibilities such as recruitment incentives, relocation bonuses, repayment of student loans, and career intern programs, and other human resources initiatives to help recruit and retain talent. Some of our agencies make great use of existing flexibilities to support their workforce goals, and all our agencies can learn from their successes.

- NRCS has made use of on-the-spot hiring at career fairs and has developed a recruitment incentives brochure that instructs supervisors on how to use flexibilities.
- The FSIS serves as a Department benchmark in the area of incentives to attract and retain high-quality employees. FSIS has used tools such as recruitment and relocation bonuses, paid moving expenses, superior qualifications appointments, retention allowances, and the Physicians Comparability Allowance. Over the last 2 fiscal years, FSIS spent approximately \$2.5 million on these incentives, resulting in an improved ability to attract top talent to previously hard-to-fill occupations. The FSIS recruitment plan includes the use of a variety of bonuses and incentives, such as bonuses to recruit in-plant Veterinary Medical Officers. Another key element of the FSIS plan is the use of a newly developed Food Safety Fellows Program to recruit, train, and utilize outstanding scientists to provide FSIS with a steady stream of highly qualified scientists. In fact, the group that developed this program received special recognition in the form of a USDA Honor Award in FY2002. FSIS has partnered with the Public Health Service to use Commission Corps Officers with strong scientific skills to enhance FSIS's public health capabilities.

- RD needed to recruit and retain bilingual employees for its Centralized Servicing Center to communicate with Spanish-speaking borrowers. RD conducted a variety of successful recruiting efforts geared toward the Hispanic community, including radio interviews, participation in festivals, and the use of referral incentives. After conducting focus groups with bilingual employees to understand their needs, RD began offering retention allowances to bilingual GS-7 employees that has improved retention rates of these employees. To increase its ability to recruit entry-level electrical engineers, RD recently began offering recruitment bonuses and an accelerated promotion program that allows these employees to receive a career ladder promotion after 6 months instead of 1 year.
- The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 amended subtitle B of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998, to establish within USDA a special pay category for distinguished, world-class scientists, the Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS). This service will consist of not more than 100 members. Under the SSRS, the Secretary is authorized to recruit, appoint, and pay world-class bench scientists, without regard to the limitations of Title 5 U.S. code. The SSRS will boost the Department's competitive ability to attract and retain high-caliber research scientists.

Unfortunately, not all USDA managers are aware of the various flexibilities available to them or how best to apply them. As a result, USDA requires improved communication processes regarding flexibilities.

Improvement Goal 4:

Align recruitment and retention strategies with workforce planning efforts to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts and close critical position and competency gaps.

Action Strategies:

Department/Office of Human Resources Management

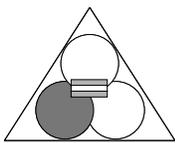
- Assess Departmentwide recruitment and retention policies and make the necessary adjustments to ensure alignment with workforce planning and deployment plans, including mission-critical positions and competency gaps.
- Enhance coordination among agencies to ensure economies of scale and share lessons learned and best practices; use a working group of agency representatives to develop solutions that increase USDA's effectiveness in attracting the best talent. At a minimum, this group should address—
 - USDA-wide “brand” marketing development
 - Streamlining hiring processes
 - Use of standardized automation
 - Establishing recruiting networks and alliances
 - Market and customer profile research

- Promotional campaigns
 - Distribution of materials that describe USDA as an employer
 - Assessing and pursuing necessary legislative changes and other authorities.
- Increase understanding of the use of HR flexibilities throughout the Department by increasing awareness of available HR flexibilities and authorities, and by emphasizing planning for their use in the budget cycle.
 - Develop and implement SSRS.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

- Develop and align agency-specific recruitment and retention plans with workforce planning and deployment plans; focus on mission-critical positions as well as existing and projected competency gaps.
- Train recruiters and supply the necessary materials to effectively represent the agency and USDA.
- Continue to explore and promote the use of HR flexibilities to recruit and retain employees and emphasize planning for their use in the budget cycle.
- Increase the use of senior leaders and program managers in recruiting activities, especially those focused on meeting diversity goals and filling mission-critical and competency-gap positions (e.g., at the university level and PMI program).

5.1.5 Leadership Development and Succession Planning



The way USDA develops its future leaders and plans for replenishing its pipeline of supervisory and managerial talent is key to the Department's success. A projected 65 percent of our SES workforce will be eligible to retire in the next 5 years. Even though it is unlikely that all of the SES population will retire at once, the Department should take aggressive steps to ensure the continuity of its leadership talent. Our approach to succession planning is to ensure that there is a trained group of employees eligible to assume leadership positions.

The Department is about to embark on a new SES Candidate Development Program. It is a rigorous program that is tied to developing leaders in those areas that will be hardest hit by attrition in the next 5 years. Other Department-coordinated leadership development offerings include the Congressional Fellows Program, the Brookings Institution activities on Capitol Hill, the National War College, the Federal Executive Institute (FEI), Executive MBA program at George Washington University (GWU), and the Harvard Executive program courses. USDA agencies may request to have staff participate in these programs. Intergovernmental Personnel Act exchanges or assignments are another method for top managers and executives to gain unique and valuable learning experiences.

Additionally, USDA is working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) to develop a tri-agency rotational intern program. The

Department has also been offered the opportunity to send staff to various EPA leadership training programs, in an effort to fill empty course slots. This, as above, ensures a group of eligible employees to assume leadership positions.

Outside the USDA SES program, each agency has its own leadership development program, and many of these programs are exceptional.

- The NRCS is in the process of developing a leadership initiative to provide a customized, high-impact, leadership learning experience to select GS-13–GS-15 employees. The program will be based on OPM’s leadership competencies and aligned with the strategic direction of NRCS.
- The Forest Service has designed and is currently beginning to implement a five-tiered Leadership Succession Program (LSP). It is also in the process of creating an Office of Succession Planning, reporting to the Deputy Chief of the Forest Service. This office will build all the components of the LSP, including mentoring, coaching, experiential learning, formal training, knowledge management resources, and alignment of selection and tracking and evaluation with HR systems. The Deputy Chief feels that succession planning is very important and encourages senior-level managers to spend at least 10 percent of their time on succession planning activities. He believes that leadership development is a critical role of current leaders at the Forest Service.
- FSIS established a succession planning leadership council, composed of agency executives and subject matter experts, that sets short- and long-term goals. The short-term goals of developing a Leadership Competency Model and providing 360-degree evaluation of GS-14 and 15 employees have been completed. In the long term, FSIS will focus on selection and development of high-potential candidates for future leadership roles.
- APHIS also has a long history of providing development programs to better prepare different levels of staff to assume higher levels of leadership. In addition to classroom training, the programs provide mentoring and coaching, a mission-oriented action learning project, and 360-degree feedback. APHIS has also embarked on an aggressive executive coaching program in which top executives are provided professional coaches to assist them in specific developmental areas. APHIS has also trained a cadre of in-house coaches to provide coaching services to mid-level managers.

The Department recognizes that the agencies could greatly benefit from participating in a forum for sharing best practices across the agencies as well as from a model or toolkit for succession planning. USDA has already begun to develop a process for identifying best practices and making them available through a central Web-based resource. When complete, the Web repository is expected to include, among other items, fixed course schedules for FEI application dates, program cost information, and leadership competency links. The Department plans to enhance the sharing of program ideas and course slots across agencies to save costs and streamline processes. One effort under way is a Departmentwide consortium of training managers who meet quarterly in order to share best practices, leverage resources, and learn from presentations on various leadership development topics.

Improvement Goal 5:

Ensure leadership continuity and development through workforce planning and analysis, and optimal use of available tools and resources throughout the Department, in order to better achieve mission requirements.

Action Strategies:

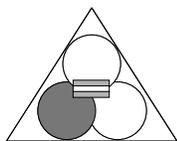
Department/Office of Human Resources Management

- Effectively implement the SES Candidate Development Program (SESCDP).
- Include the leadership function (i.e., managers, supervisors, and SES cadre) in the workforce planning and analysis process to identify position and competency requirements at the Department level.
- Make available and encourage the use of professional coaches for executive development.
- Develop a Departmentwide leadership development and succession planning framework and toolkit, based on best practices, that are tied to workforce planning and recruitment strategies.
- Create a Web link on a central Human Capital Web site for leadership development information that promotes the available leadership development tools and resources.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

- Include the leadership function (e.g., managers, supervisors, and SES cadre) in the workforce planning and analysis process to identify agency-specific position and competency requirements.
- Develop agency-specific succession plans using a Departmental framework and toolkit.

5.1.6 Knowledge Management and Employee Development



USDA leadership is committed to providing opportunities for development, including formal classroom training and eLearning. The Department has recently designed and is in the process of launching Departmentwide coaching, mentoring, and distance-learning programs. Certification is also an increasing focus of the Department for employee development and closing critical competency gaps. Currently, two crosscutting competency areas with significant certification activity are project management and security. While some of our agencies are aligning training strategies to mission accomplishment, overall, the linkage between employee development and mission accomplishment needs to be strengthened. In addition, OHRM should assist agencies in addressing cross-Department competency development needs such as customer service, program management, and financial management.

One of the primary efforts to support continuous learning, track training investments, and utilize learning technologies at USDA is the establishment of a Departmentwide learning management system (LMS). The Departmentwide LMS is one of the high-profile USDA eGovernment initiatives. The LMS will utilize IT to help solve human capital issues. The proposed LMS will be integrated with the President's eLearning initiative and allow USDA to leverage the general courses available through GoLearn.gov and provide an infrastructure for courses that are specific to USDA and its agencies, as well as track expenditures, attendance, participant notification, Race and National Origin (RNO) data, certifications, types of training, time of training, courses offered, facilities used, sources of training, integrated authoring tools, etc. The system will also allow USDA to monitor all training that is occurring in the agencies and provide competency management and individual development planning for employees. Currently, a working group is collecting agency requirements for the system. This group is pursuing a single, enterprise-wide, integrated system that will provide learning management, performance support, and performance management services.

The Department also has a cross-agency content management team that is pursuing topics, such as information management and the use of corporate taxonomy, that will lead to improvements in organizing, accessing, and using information, documents, and corporate knowledge. This team is currently finalizing a business case for an enterprise-wide approach to supporting these requirements. These efforts are critical initial steps in achieving USDA's knowledge management goals in human capital terms (e.g., capturing the knowledge of those retiring in mission-critical positions).

Improvement Goal 6:

Ensure that the USDA captures and shares knowledge, and develops employee competence to better perform the Department's mission.

Action Strategies:

Department/Office of Human Resources Management

Knowledge Management

- Actively participate in the USDA eGovernment content and knowledge management effort to help address issues such as—
 - Capturing retiree and departing employee knowledge—a first priority
 - Utilizing incentives for employee/alumni participation in knowledge capture
 - Addressing Departmentwide competency gaps
 - Promoting communities of practice and networking.

Employee Development

- Develop a Departmentwide training strategy that provides policy guidelines and oversight for training and development initiatives (including how to assess competency gap closure), ensures linkages to USDA workforce planning and deployment efforts, and provides a Departmentwide dynamic “central resource” for best practices.

- Participate in and support eGovernment enterprise-wide efforts to establish a learning management system for the Department that provides electronic delivery of courses, competency assessment, course listings, Individual Development Plan (IDP) development, and automated tracking functions.
- Work with relevant agencies and staff offices to develop or procure employee development programs and tools that address crosscutting competency development needs as needed.
- Promote the use of career planning based on mission requirements and specific organization goals and competency needs throughout the Department.
- Assess the impact of agency training strategies on closing Departmentwide competency gaps (e.g., IT, project management) and meeting business goals, using the new LMS when it becomes available.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

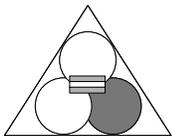
Knowledge Management

- Actively participate in the USDA eGovernment content and knowledge management effort, and implement the Department’s knowledge management strategy when complete.

Employee Development

- Develop and/or implement a training strategy linked to workforce planning and deployment efforts that addresses standards for technology investments.
- Participate in and support implementation of the ongoing eGovernment enterprise-wide efforts to establish a learning management system; implement the Department’s LMS when available.
- Assess the impact of agency training strategies on closing competency gaps and meeting business goals.

5.1.7 Performance Management



A mission area’s or agency’s performance management program success will be measured by the extent to which it—

- Aligns employee and team performance expectations with organizational strategic plans, including performance goals and objectives
- Provides for employee performance evaluation that focuses on results and objective measures of performance based on established performance plans
- Uses the performance management process as a tool to improve continuous two-way communication of organizational, team, and employee performance objectives and

accomplishments; and achieves improvement of employee, team, and organizational performance through continuous training and development.

Linking performance to organizational goals and mission remains a challenge across the Department. As a first step to building this linkage, the Honor Awards (the Department's most prestigious non-monetary awards) categories were changed to reflect the Department's strategic goals. In addition, the Department recently completed the first appraisal period of a new performance management system for the SES that reflects mission outcomes and business results. Future steps include establishing this linkage for managers and, eventually, all employees.

The OPM Departmentwide oversight report issued in June 2002 found that USDA employees know what is expected of them on the job and are held accountable for achieving results, and that supervisors clearly communicate expectations. However, concerns were raised regarding the effectiveness of generic standards (where they are used) and making performance distinctions, especially among superior, successful, and mediocre performance. Finally, the Department as a whole will begin to focus on using performance results to identify developmental needs.

Agencies and their managers could use tools to help them manage performance more effectively. In the past year, OHRM has developed a half-day course for supervisors using OPM's "How to Deal with Poor Performers" and will begin to share it with agencies. The Department can provide even more tools to help managers by capitalizing on some of the best practices of its agencies, such as FSIS's "In-Plant Performance System Assessment" tool and NRCS's automated performance appraisal system. FSIS developed and frequently delivers two agency-specific performance management courses for supervisors and managers.

Improvement Goal 7:

Ensure the performance appraisal system is aligned with Departmental/organization mission accomplishment and is linked to employee development and recognition programs, ultimately improving individual and organizational performance.

Action Strategies:

Department/Office of Human Resources Management

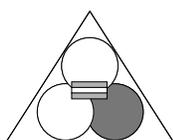
- Fully implement the revised SES performance appraisal system that links executive performance to mission accomplishment and the strategic plan and measures it; assess effectiveness of the new SES performance appraisal and make changes as necessary.
- Assess the effectiveness of the current performance management system (including performance appraisal, awards and recognition programs, and related development strategies) and make necessary adjustments to ensure the system addresses performance distinctions, poor performers, and developmental needs.
- Establish a central resource or repository for performance management system information, guidance, and tools across the Department, including internal and external best practices and benchmarking; prototype systems that are user-friendly, flexible,

useful, and dynamic; self-evaluation tools and checklists; and training and education for managers and supervisors, etc.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

- Link the performance management system (including performance appraisal, awards and recognition, and developmental needs) with organizational mission accomplishment for all employees starting with managers. When the linkage is established, educate and/or communicate to employees about the linkage.
- Work with OHRM to assess the effectiveness of the agency performance management system (including performance appraisal, awards and recognition programs, and related development strategies), and ensure that the system addresses performance distinctions.

5.1.8 Diversity Management, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Civil Rights



A diverse, high-performing workforce and a discrimination-free workplace are USDA’s priorities. To achieve these priorities, the Department is firmly committed to increasing diversity programs, providing equal opportunity, and ensuring civil rights.

Currently, the OHRM, the Diversity Advisory Council, and the Office of Civil Rights work in collaboration with the USDA mission areas and their agencies to build and maintain a diverse, high-performing workforce and create a discrimination-free workplace.

The Office of Human Resources Management

The OHRM provides the human capital expertise and framework to implement and sustain diversity initiatives and civil rights within USDA. The OHRM designs and operates programs and activities to attract, hire, develop, retain, and advance a diverse, high-performing workforce by:

- Providing overall direction, leadership, guidance, analysis, and oversight for USDA human capital management
- Establishing policies and infrastructure advancing work–life programs that incorporate civil rights, EEO, and diversity initiatives
- Employing special emphasis program managers to attract and recruit under-represented employee populations
- Developing and providing workforce demographics and related statistics to the HR directors and top management at monthly Human Resources Leadership Council meetings
- Reviewing disciplinary actions taken against employees for discrimination or misconduct related to civil rights.

The Diversity Advisory Council

In 2002, the Diversity Advisory Council (DAC) was created to provide advice on issues raised by USDA employee advisory councils. The Council's vision is that the USDA will become an efficient, effective, discrimination-free, and diverse organization in which all employees and customers are treated with respect and dignity.

Seven employee advisory councils comprise the DAC; each is chaired by an SES-level sponsor and has mission area representation. The employee advisory councils are—

- African American Employee Advisory Council
- American Indian/Alaska Native Employee Advisory Council
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Employee Advisory Council
- Gay and Lesbian Employee Advisory Council
- Secretary's Advisory Committee for Employees with Disabilities
- Secretary's Hispanic Advisory Council
- Women Employees Advisory Council.

In FY2002 the DAC funded 16 projects in 4 categories: information gathering and analysis, employee ideas and input, recruitment and study programs, and diversity training and information. The DAC's FY2002 activities were wide-ranging and included—

- Establishing a Web site
- Funding USDA's recruitment exhibits and the recruitment video, "*Careers with a Difference*"
- Launching the USDA Mentoring Program (open to employees nationwide)
- Conducting an assessment survey at the Blacks in Government Conference
- Designing a how-to program for working effectively with tribal governments
- Sponsoring a leadership skills development seminar
- Hosting listening sessions, creating a brochure on sexual orientation, and developing a sexual orientation training module
- Organizing a disability forum describing the new reasonable accommodation procedures and strategies for hiring persons with disabilities
- Conducting women's forums
- Sponsoring students from Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions.

The Office of Civil Rights

USDA policy is to ensure that no person is subjected to prohibited discrimination in employment or in federally assisted or conducted programs or activities administered by USDA based on

race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, marital or family status, political affiliation, protected genetic information, religion, sex (gender), sexual orientation, status as a parent, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

To improve civil rights accountability, increase workforce diversity, expand access to traditionally under-represented, under-served, and socially disadvantaged groups, and ensure fair and equitable treatment of all USDA customers and employees, the Office of Civil Rights (CR)—

- Provides leadership, coordination, direction, oversight, and technical assistance
- Develops and implements policies, programs, and communication strategies
- Conducts education and training in conjunction with OHRM
- Coordinates, assesses, and enforces compliance with civil rights laws and regulations
- Collects, analyzes, and reports data to monitor change
- Administers program and employment discrimination complaint programs
- Operates a Web site
- Holds agency heads and senior executives accountable for compliance and assesses their performance.

In October 2000, CR published the “Long-Term Improvement Plan (LTIP) for the Office of Civil Rights.” The LTIP outlines actions necessary to fundamentally improve operations in CR so that employment and program complaints of discrimination will be consistently, effectively, and timely processed.

Mission Areas and Agencies

Mission areas and agencies implement the policies, programs, and activities created and promoted by OHRM and CR. Currently, they are executing and pursuing a broad range of supporting activities such as hosting diversity conferences and conducting civil rights training and assessments. Mission areas and agencies are central to USDA's achieving diversity, civil rights, and EEO objectives.

Improvement Goal 8:

Ensure a diverse workforce with the necessary skills to accomplish the USDA mission and strategic goals.

Action Strategies:

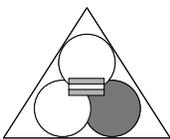
Department/Office of Human Resources Management

- Develop strategies for human capital management and the DAC that integrate workforce diversity initiatives, civil rights, and EEO. Ensure the HC Plan incorporates the intent of civil rights laws, EEO policies, merit system principles, prohibited personnel practices, and related USDA policies and programs.
- Continue to ensure that diversity, civil rights, and EEO are effectively and efficiently integrated into all workforce planning, recruitment, and retention strategies with emphasis on attracting, hiring, developing, and advancing applicants and employees who are members of under-represented or socially disadvantaged groups. Ensure that diversity, civil rights, and EEO are in alignment with USDA goals and objectives.
- Develop a communications strategy and use information technology (Web site, expanded eGovernment) to coordinate and facilitate effective and efficient information sharing that promotes diversity and fair and nondiscriminatory treatment, assesses compliance, and evaluates organizational success.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

- Ensure that diversity, civil rights, and EEO are properly aligned with and incorporated, as appropriate, into all strategic planning initiatives and annual performance plans.
- Incorporate diversity targets in workforce planning; continue to focus on attracting, hiring, developing, and advancing applicants and employees who are members of under-represented and socially disadvantaged groups. Ensure compliance with civil rights and EEO laws, merit systems principles, veterans' preference, and prohibited personnel practices.
- Participate in Departmentwide information collection and sharing to facilitate compiling and disclosing data used in assessing compliance with civil rights, EEO, and related reporting requirements.

5.1.9 Labor and Employee Relations and Conflict Management



USDA has eight labor organizations (unions) in 95 separate bargaining units throughout the Department, 25 of which are considered dormant. Unions represent approximately 43,000 USDA employees with approximately 11,300 dues-paying members. USDA has national consultation obligations with its two largest unions, NFEE-Federal District 1, and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE).

Although Executive Order (EO) 12871, which had mandated establishment of labor-management partnership councils, was rescinded, collaboration-based committees continue to function in several of the mission areas by mutual agreement of the parties.

In the Employee Relations (ER) program area, mission areas exercise a full range of delegated authorities to discipline employees, address poor performance, take adverse actions, and represent the Department in administrative proceedings. Feedback from managers and

supervisors indicates a need for more training in how to effectively handle poor performance among staff. The Department has also found it difficult to obtain useful trend data on disputes, penalties, and final actions taken.

An automated system for tracking and analyzing the number of ER actions and Labor Management Relations (LMR) disputes (e.g., grievances, negotiation impasses, and unfair labor practice allegations) would help the Department identify and respond to dispute trends as well as assess program effectiveness.

A proactive Labor/Employee Relations approach will facilitate resolution of disputes at the earliest possible stage. Whenever possible, consistent with the applicable collective bargaining agreements, the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process should be used to resolve conflicts and issues. USDA created the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (CPRC) in 1998 to establish the regulatory, logistical, and practical tools necessary to eliminate destructive conflict at USDA, not only in the workplace, but also with external customers such as farmers, ranchers, and even other agencies. USDA emphasizes training in conflict management skills—particularly for managers and supervisors—and the appropriate use of ADR techniques, such as mediation, early and outside the established dispute resolution systems. The use of ADR does not take away or interfere with an employee’s legal rights under the established dispute resolution systems (e.g., EEO, negotiated, and administrative grievance).

Improvement Goal 9:

Prevent and successfully resolve employee disputes and maintain effective working relationships with labor organizations.

Action Strategies:

Department/Office of Human Resources Management

- Establish a Departmental strategy or protocol for dealing with LMR issues at the Secretarial and Subcabinet levels.
- Share LMR and ER best practices within USDA agencies to promote the development of practitioners (i.e., training for LMR Specialists beginning November 18, 2002), shared utilization of resources, strategic planning, and issue resolution.
- Develop a standardized electronic system to record formal disputes (e.g., grievances and appeals) within the USDA to enable management to prevent and successfully resolve systemic problems causing employee disputes.
- Evaluate employee satisfaction with the USDA ADR program.

Corporate Standards for USDA Agencies

- Incorporate basic LMR and labor contract administration training into new supervisor training or new labor contract orientation programs for supervisors and managers.

- Establish an agency LMR strategy and plan that articulates goals and actions the agency will take to address LMR issues and obligations that may arise in conjunction with agency program changes.
- Participate in the development of the standardized electronic dispute record system and its eventual implementation.

6.0 PRESIDENT'S MANAGEMENT AGENDA COORDINATION OVERVIEW

It is critical that USDA's HC Plan is coordinated with the four other PMA initiatives: competitive sourcing, financial management, expanding electronic government, and budget and performance integration. While this alignment is part of the HC Plan's goals and action strategies, the following summarizes the areas of alignment.

6.1 COMPETITIVE SOURCING

USDA developed a Competitive Sourcing Plan in May 2002 with the preliminary goal of competing 15 percent of positions in the FAIR Act inventory by September 30, 2003. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) is the lead for competitive sourcing in the Department. OCFO established a working group in October 2002 to ensure consistent application of competitive sourcing across the Department. OHRM plays a key role in this working group by providing human resources guidance for the development of Most Effective Organizations. This human resources guidance will include, but not be limited to, deployment, reduction in force, transfer of function, labor management relations, and all key considerations of workforce planning and restructuring activities.

Additionally, competitive sourcing is a tool that USDA can consider during workforce planning (e.g., filling critical skill gaps), or implements to enable restructuring efforts. Action strategies related to workforce planning and deployment call for a Departmentwide model for workforce planning that addresses competitive sourcing. In addition, an action strategy on agency restructuring plans calls for incorporating competitive sourcing into these plans.

6.2 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

USDA can improve its financial management by the human capital efforts of educating financial and non-financial managers on sound financial management practices and holding managers accountable for financial management in their program and performance evaluations. The HC Plan specifically outlines an action strategy at the Departmental level for developing programs and tools that address crosscutting competency development needs such as financial management. In addition, the goal of aligning the performance appraisal system with Department and/or organization mission accomplishments will support accountability related to financial management.

6.3 EXPANDING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT

In June 2002, the Department published its eGovernment Strategic Plan. The plan focuses on improvements in electronic service delivery for citizens, external organizations, and employees. Two areas in the eGovernment Plan that are directly related to improving human capital are knowledge management and employee development. The Knowledge Management and Employee Development section of the HC Plan highlights the Department's planned activities in these areas. An established working group is focused on content and knowledge management, and an action strategy calls for increased participation in this group to ensure that human capital issues, such as capturing retiree knowledge, are addressed. In addition, human resources representatives across the Department are working toward the completion of a business case for

an enterprise-wide learning management system (LMS) to support USDA's eLearning initiative. This system will enable the Department to offer and track courses, and provide direct and indirect training costs, attendance, certifications, types of training, time of training, courses offered, facilities used, and sources of training.

Furthermore, we will be considering other eGovernment opportunities to increase efficiency of program and administrative staff. Some examples include Human Resources Online, eProcurement, ePermits/eCertificates, and eLoans. The training costs and potential staff time savings realized as a part of the eGovernment efforts will be considered as a part of workforce planning and restructuring efforts.

6.4 BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE INTEGRATION

For Budget and Performance Integration (B & PI) to be effective at USDA, there are several areas that could benefit from strong human capital management. These include skills building of budget and planning staff, workload analysis models, and improved accountability. To ensure optimal collaboration across planning and evaluation and budget, staff in these areas will need developmental opportunities to better understand the facets of each other's profession, including training and rotational assignment. The employee development action strategy that calls for career planning based on mission requirements and specific organizational goals should support these developmental efforts in the planning and budget areas.

Workload analysis can assist in splitting overhead and capital costs, a partial step toward full budgetary cost accounting. Effective workforce planning systems include a workload analysis component. While some of USDA's agencies conduct workload analysis, others do not at this time. As part of the Workforce Planning and Development goal, there is an action strategy to develop a Departmental model for workforce planning that includes workload analysis. Agencies will be required to conduct workforce planning efforts in accordance with that model, which ensures direct alignment with the agencies' missions, goals, and objectives.

The HC Plan's goal of aligning the performance appraisal system with Department and organization mission accomplishments will support accountability related to budget and performance integration. The Department has already started to implement a new performance appraisal system for executives that links performance to mission accomplishment and strategic goals. The HC Plan also has an action strategy that calls for linking all employee performance appraisals with organizational objectives and mission accomplishments.

APPENDIX A: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A.1 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OVERVIEW

This human capital implementation plan shows the timeframes in which USDA will undertake the action strategies in this plan, and identifies key performance measures. Resource constraints and other issues were carefully considered when determining implementation timelines for various initiatives.

A key element in determining successful implementation of USDA's HC Plan is measuring how we are progressing with our goals and whether our action strategies are effectively addressing those goals over time. Performance measures will function to monitor progress toward meeting goals on two levels. First, adhering to the agreed-upon timelines and meeting certain milestones will help to assess where we are against our project schedule. Second, a high-level set of critical measures will assist executives in managing the new initiatives being implemented. These measures enable USDA to assess progress against a goal and identify any areas needing improvement, while making efficient use of the resources available. They are overarching and results-driven in nature and are aligned with the human capital performance measures in USDA's Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan. Additionally, USDA will pay particular attention to a few pervasive human capital challenges, which the Subcabinet executives and other external stakeholders consider to be high priority. Currently, five key outcomes are identified in the pervasive human capital challenge category. These key outcomes are also mentioned in the December 2002 GAO Report (*GAO-03-225 Status of Addressing Major Management Challenges*). They are directly related to the pervasive human capital challenges in Strategic Alignment, Talent Management, Leadership Development and Succession Planning, Performance Management, and Diversity, EEO, and Civil Rights. In the Action Plans (section A.2), the measures tied to pervasive human capital challenges are denoted with an asterisk (*). Our process for monitoring, analyzing, and evaluating all performance measures is fully described in our Human Capital Accountability System Plan. A quarterly reporting process that is a key component of the accountability system will provide ongoing tracking, monitoring, and evaluation of the HC Plan implementation.

The letter "D" indicates a Departmental action strategy and an "A" indicates an agency action strategy. A spreadsheet with all action strategies, timelines, and associated resource implications is available from OHRM.



A.2 ACTION PLANS

HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Strategic Alignment and Human Capital Planning	Goal 1: Institute a practice of systematic human capital management that is aligned with the USDA and agency strategic plans and integrated with budgets	D 1.0 Review and help Mission Areas/Agencies develop their human capital plans.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities
		D 2.0 OHRM will use the HC Plan to set priorities for its resources allocations and funding requests.	3 rd Qtr FY03; review 3 rd Qtr of each FY
	*Measure 1a: 100 percent of USDA Departmental Administration and Mission Areas/Agencies have developed HC strategies, which are aligned with Strategic Plans or Annual Performance Plans by FY04.	D 3.0 Implement a Human Capital Communication Strategy to ensure stakeholder participation in and understanding of their responsibilities related to the HC Plan.	1 st Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities
		D 4.0 Hold operational forums for continuous human capital learning; sharing best practices among the agencies; and hosting skill-building workshops in order to build capacity in a variety of human capital areas, starting with developing effective agency human capital plans and conducting workforce planning.	3 rd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities
		D 5.0 Promote an environment of collaboration across the agencies; operational practitioner working groups will meet regularly (e.g., monthly or quarterly) to share best practices, exchange ideas, and build skills in all human capital areas.	2 nd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities; working groups to meet the 1 st Qtr of each FY
		D 6.0 Establish a Web site for information sharing in all human capital framework areas.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, completion 4 th Qtr FY03
		D 7.0 Work with key stakeholders to review/update the HC Plan regularly.	4 th Qtr FY03; review 4 th Qtr of each FY
		A 1.0 Develop (i.e., either by developing a unique agency plan or adopting and modifying the Department's HC Plan) and begin implementing a human capital plan that includes a communications component.	2 nd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities; 4 th Qtr FY03 first HC Plan due with a review to be conducted the 1 st Qtr of each FY
		A 2.0 Integrate agency human capital plan elements into agency strategic plan/annual performance plans as the opportunity presents itself.	1 st Qtr FY03 start discussion with ongoing activities
		A 3.0 Set priorities for resources and funding in accordance with the agency human capital plan.	3 rd Qtr FY03, review 3 rd Qtr of each FY
		A 4.0 Participate regularly in Departmentwide collaboration efforts.	1 st Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities



HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Workforce Planning and Deployment	Goal 2: Institute a Departmentwide practice of conducting workforce planning that enables the Department and our agencies to efficiently and effectively deploy the workforce, as well as prevent skills gaps. Measure 2a: 100 percent of USDA agencies have developed a workforce plan, including reviewing their structure, which has been reviewed by OHRM no later than FY04	D 1.0 Conduct Departmentwide workforce planning and update annually.	1 st Qtr FY03, update 1 st Qtr annually
		D 2.0 Establish a Department model for workforce planning that addresses: competency definition/management, projected workforce imbalances and skills gaps, workload analysis, reviews of organizational layers, competitive sourcing, mission-critical areas, and recruitment and retention strategies.	2 nd Qtr FY03
		D 2.0 Develop a Web-based automated workforce planning system that enables information retrieval by those outside OHRM.	Begin effort in 2 nd Qtr FY04, end effort 2 nd Qtr FY05
		D 3.0 Review agency workforce restructuring plans for completeness and consistency with Department policy.	Began effort in FY02, complete 4 th Qtr FY04
		A 1.0 Conduct workforce planning using the Departmentwide model with program manager involvement.	Begin effort in 3 rd Qtr FY03, complete 4 th Qtr FY03
		A 2.0 Develop and implement workforce restructuring plans, with program manager involvement, that incorporates competitive sourcing solutions and resource savings related to eGovernment efficiencies.	4 th Qtr FY02 with ongoing activities to be completed in 1 st Qtr FY07
		A 3.0 Provide updates (all USDA agencies that have not done so, e.g., non-service centers excluding Forest Service) to the Department on restructuring plans.	Began 4 th Qtr FY02, reporting in 1 st Qtr FY03, activities to be completed 1 st Qtr FY07

HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Accountability System	Goal 3: Ensure that USDA HR programs are strategically aligned, effective, efficient, and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (e.g., Veteran's Preference, EEO, Merit System Principles) using a Departmentwide accountability system. Measure 3a: Percent of USDA agencies showing progress on OPM's Human Capital Standards for Success	D 1.0 Facilitate the development of a standardized USDA HRM Accountability Program based upon the OPM Accountability System.	Began 4 th Qtr FY02, completion 1 st Qtr FY03
		D 2.0 Assess Department and agency human capital progress using a "results" reporting system that is part of the USDA HRM Accountability Program.	4 th Qtr FY02 with ongoing activities
		A 1.0 Participate in the development of USDA's HRM Accountability Program.	Began 4 th Qtr FY02, completion 1 st Qtr FY03
		A 2.0 Systematically evaluate agency programs using processes, tools, and schedules contained in the USDA Accountability Program	2 nd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities
		A 3.0 Provide quarterly reports on progress towards USDA Accountability Program goals and actions.	4 th Qtr FY02 with ongoing activities



HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Talent Management	Goal 4: Align recruitment and retention strategies with workforce planning efforts to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts and close critical position and competency gaps. *Measure 4a: No USDA mission-critical occupations with significant skills gaps (less than 15 percent) by FY07	D 1.0 Assess Departmentwide recruitment and retention policy and make the necessary adjustments to ensure alignment with workforce planning and deployment plans, including mission-critical positions and competency gaps.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, complete 3 rd Qtr FY03
		D 2.0 Enhance coordination among agencies to ensure economies of scale and share lessons learned and best practices; use a working group of agency representatives to develop solutions that increase USDA's effectiveness in attracting the best talent.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, complete 3 rd Qtr FY03, ongoing activities
		D 3.0 Increase understanding of the use of HR flexibilities throughout the Department by increasing awareness of available flexibilities (e.g., classes of flexibilities) and by emphasizing planning for their use in the budget cycle.	2 nd Qtr FY03 with activities the 1 st Qtr of each successive FY
		D 4.0 Develop and implement Senior Scientific Research Service.	Began development in FY02, implementation in 2 nd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities
		A 1.0 Develop and align agency-specific recruitment and retention plans with workforce planning and deployment plans; focus on mission-critical positions and existing and projected competency gaps.	4 th Qtr FY03 with a review the 4 th Qtr of each successive FY
		A 2.0 Train recruiters and supply the necessary materials to effectively represent the agency and USDA.	Began in FY02 with ongoing activities
		A 3.0 Continue to explore and promote the use of HR flexibilities to recruit and retain employees and emphasize planning for their use in the budget cycle.	Began in FY02 with ongoing activities
		A 4.0 Increase the use of senior-level leaders and program managers in recruiting activities, especially those focused on meeting diversity goals and filling mission-critical and competency-gap positions (e.g., at the university level and PMI program).	3 rd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities

HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Leadership Development and Succession Planning	Goal 5: Ensure leadership continuity and development through workforce planning and analysis, and optimal use of available tools and resources throughout the Department, in order to better achieve mission requirements.	D 1.0 Effectively implement the SESCO.	Began in FY02, completion in 3rd Qtr FY03, ongoing activity through the 4 th Qtr FY04
		D 2.0 Include the leadership function (i.e., managers, supervisors and SES) in the workforce planning and analysis process to identify position and competency requirements at the Department level.	2 nd Qtr FY03 with a review activity the 1 st Qtr of each successive FY
		D 3.0 Provide on-going coaching programs for executives.	Begin 3 rd Qtr FY03
	*Measure 5a: Retention rate of employees in career GS-15 and SES positions	D 4.0 Develop a Departmentwide leadership development and succession planning framework and toolkit based on best practices that is tied to workforce planning and recruitment strategies.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, completion 4 th Qtr FY03
	*Measure 5b: Ratio of employees (GS-15 and above) enrolled in or having completed a managerial development program or SESCO versus SES career positions	D 5.0 Create a Web link on a central HC website for leadership development information that promotes the available leadership development tools/resources.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, completion 4 th Qtr FY03
		A 1.0 Include the leadership function (i.e., managers, supervisors, and SES cadre) in the workforce planning and analysis process to identify agency-specific position and competency requirements.	2 nd Qtr FY03
		A 2.0 Develop agency-specific succession plans using a Departmental framework and toolkit.	Begin 4 th Qtr FY03, completion 1 st Qtr FY04



HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Knowledge Management and Employee Development	Goal 6: Ensure that USDA captures and shares knowledge, and develops employee competence to better perform the Department's mission.	D 1.0 Actively participate in the eGovernment enterprise-wide content/knowledge management effort to ensure human capital issues are addressed.	2 nd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities
	Measure 6a: Responses to the Government-Wide Survey (GWS) Leadership and Knowledge Management questions # 45 - #50 are at or above the 3.00 indicator level	D 2.0 Develop a Departmentwide training strategy that provides policy guidelines and oversight for training and development initiatives, ensures linkages to USDA workforce planning and deployment efforts, and provides a Departmentwide dynamic "central resource" for best practices.	Begin 3 rd Qtr FY03, completion 1 st Qtr FY04
	Measure 6b: 100 percent of USDA agencies with Knowledge Management strategies in place by FY07	D 3.0 Participate in and support eGovernment enterprise-wide efforts to establish a learning management system for the Department that provides electronic delivery of courses, competency assessment, course listings, IDP development, and automated tracking functions.	Begin 4 th Qtr FY02, delivery 3 rd Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities
		D 4.0 Work with relevant agencies and staff offices to develop or procure employee development programs/tools such as mentoring that address cross-cutting competency development needs.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, completion 1 st Qtr FY04
		D 5.0 Promote the use of career planning based upon mission requirements/specific organization goals and competency needs throughout the Department.	4 th Qtr FY03 with ongoing activities, review 4 th Qtr each successive FY
		D. 6.0 Assess the impact of agency training strategies on closing Departmentwide competency gaps (e.g., information technology, project management) and meeting business goals, using the new Learning Management System when it becomes available.	Begin 2nd Qtr FY03, with ongoing activities
		A 1.0 Actively participate in the eGovernment enterprise-wide content/knowledge management effort to ensure human capital issues are addressed; implement Department's knowledge management strategy when complete.	2 nd Qtr FY03
		A 2.0 Develop and/or implement a training strategy linked to workforce planning and deployment efforts that addresses standards for technology investments.	4 th Qtr FY03
		A 3.0 Participate in and support implementation of the on-going eGovernment enterprise-wide efforts to establish a learning management system; implement the Department's LMS when available.	Began in FY02 with ongoing activities
		A 4.0 Assess the impact of agency training strategies on closing competency gaps and meeting business goals.	Begin in 4 th Qtr FY04, with ongoing activities

HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Performance Management	Goal 7: Ensure the performance appraisal system is aligned with Departmental/ organization mission accomplishment and is linked to employee development and recognition programs, ultimately improving individual and organizational performance. *Measure 7a: Responses to GWS Performance Culture Survey questions are at or above the 3.00 indicator level	D 1.0 Fully implement the revised SES performance appraisal system that links executive performance to mission accomplishment and the strategic plan and measures it; assess effectiveness of the new SES performance appraisal, and make changes as necessary.	Implemented 4 th Qtr FY02, Assess 2 nd Qtr FY03
		D 2.0 Assess the effectiveness of the current performance management system (including performance appraisal, awards and recognition programs, and related development strategies) and make necessary adjustments to ensure the system addresses performance distinctions, poor performers, and developmental needs.	Begin 4 th Qtr FY03, completion 2 nd Qtr FY04
		D 3.0 Establish a central resource/repository for performance management system information, guidance, and tools across the Department, including: internal and external best practices/ benchmarking, prototype systems that are user-friendly, flexible, useful, and dynamic, self-evaluation tools/checklists, training/education for managers and supervisors, etc.	Begin 1 st Qtr FY04 with ongoing activities
		A 1.0 Link the performance management system (including performance appraisal, awards and recognition, and developmental needs) with organizational mission accomplishment for all employees starting with managers. Where the linkage is established, educate/communicate to employees about the linkage.	Begin 4 th Qtr FY03, completion 1 st Qtr FY04 with ongoing activities
		A 2.0 Work with OHRM to assess the effectiveness of the agency performance management system (including performance appraisal, awards and recognition programs, and related development strategies) and ensure that the system addresses performance distinctions.	Begin 4 th Qtr FY03, completion 2 nd Qtr FY04



HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Diversity Management, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Civil Rights	Goal 8: Ensure a diverse workforce with the necessary skills to accomplish the USDA mission and strategic goals.	D 1.0 Develop strategies for human capital management and the DAC that integrate workforce diversity initiatives, civil rights, and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO).	2 nd Qtr FY03 with reviews the 1 st Qtr of each successive FY
	Measure 8a: 90 percent of diversity goals met by FY04 Measure 8b: 95 percent of USDA agencies have active diversity outreach strategies by FY04	D 2.0 Continue to ensure that diversity, civil rights, and EEO are effectively and efficiently integrated into all workforce planning, recruitment, and retention strategies with emphasis on attracting, hiring, developing, and advancing highly qualified applicants and employees who are members of under-represented or socially disadvantaged groups.	Begin 1 st Qtr FY04 with ongoing activities
	*Measure 8c: Percent of Civil Rights employment complaints processed in under 180 days by FY07	D 3.0 Develop a communications strategy and use information technology (Web site, expanded eGovernment) to coordinate and facilitate effective and efficient information sharing that promotes diversity, fair, and nondiscriminatory treatment, assesses compliance, and evaluates organizational success.	2 nd Qtr FY03
		A 1.0 Ensure that diversity, civil rights, and EEO are properly aligned with and incorporated, as appropriate, into all strategic planning initiatives and annual performance plans.	1 st Qtr FY04
		A 2.0 Incorporate diversity targets in workforce planning; continue to focus on attracting, hiring, developing, and advancing applicants and employees who are members of under-represented and socially disadvantaged groups.	1 st Qtr FY04
		A 3.0 Participate in Departmentwide information collection and sharing to facilitate compiling and disclosing data used in assessing compliance with civil rights, EEO, and related reporting requirements.	2 nd Qtr FY03

HC COMPONENT	HC PLAN GOAL/ MEASURE(S)	ACTION STRATEGY	TIMEFRAME
Labor and Employee Relations and Conflict Management	Goal 9: Prevent and successfully resolve employee disputes and maintain effective working relationships with labor organizations.	D 1.0 Establish a Departmental strategy or protocol for dealing with LMR issues at the Secretarial and Subcabinet levels.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, completion 4 th Qtr FY03
	Measure 9a: Response to GWS Leadership Survey question #25 is at or above the 3.00 indicator level	D 2.0 Share LMR and ER best practices within USDA agencies to promote the development of practitioners, shared utilization of resources, strategic planning and issue resolution.	Began in FY02 with ongoing activities
	Measure 9b: Usage rate of workplace ADR Program	D 3.0 Develop a standardized electronic system to record formal disputes (i.e., grievances and appeals) within the USDA to enable management to prevent and successfully resolve systemic problems causing employee disputes.	Begin 4 th Qtr FY03, completion 3 rd Qtr FY04
	Measure 9c: Percentage of disputes resolved through USDA ADR Program	D 4.0 Evaluate employee satisfaction with the USDA ADR program.	Begin 2 nd Qtr FY03, completion 2 nd Qtr FY06
	Measure 9d: Percent reduction in Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges per bargaining unit employee	A 1.0 Incorporate basic LMR and labor contract administration training into new supervisor training or new labor contract orientation programs for supervisors and managers.	Began in FY02, completion 1 st Qtr FY05
		A 2.0 Establish an agency LMR strategy and plan that articulates goals and actions the agency will take to address LMR issues and obligations that may arise in conjunction with agency program changes.	Began FY02, completion 1 st Qtr FY04
		A 3.0 Participate in the development of the standardized electronic dispute record system and its eventual implementation.	Begin 4 th Qtr FY03, completion 3 rd Qtr FY04

APPENDIX B: CIVIL RIGHTS

B.1 SECRETARY'S CIVIL RIGHTS STATEMENT

President Abraham Lincoln founded the United States Department of Agriculture in 1862 to serve the people of this Nation. Today, nearly 150 years later, USDA employees are among the finest public servants, committed to ensuring that every customer and colleague is treated with fairness, equality, and respect.

As your Secretary, I am firmly committed to ensuring USDA's compliance with civil rights and equal employment opportunity for everyone regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital or family status, political beliefs, parental status, or protected genetic information.

There is no principle more important. We must comply with every aspect of our Nation's civil rights laws. To do otherwise is simply not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

As public servants, we cannot be effective without being fair. We cannot be responsive without being respectful. We cannot deliver programs and services without being sensitive to the human issues that are so much a part of our work.

Our adherence to these principles also requires a swift, reasonable, and credible process for addressing and remedying deficiencies. It must also include consistent education and outreach to ensure civil rights are protected, our laws are enforced, and discrimination in any form is prevented.

This must be our passion and our vision. We must continue to strive for a workplace and society that are inclusive and respectful of differences, while working toward unity and harmony. Our actions must always speak louder than our words.

With your help and commitment, and using our collective best efforts across every agency and every office, we can reach new heights. Together, we can create a better workplace for all employees, and a Department that delivers programs and services to all people fairly and with integrity and equality.

I look forward to fulfilling this vision- our goals- together.

Ann M. Veneman

Secretary

B.2 CIVIL RIGHTS POLICY STATEMENT

The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2002–2007, Civil Rights policy, human capital management strategy, and performance measures impact how USDA recruits, trains, develops, and retains employees. Building and maintaining a *dynamic and effective* USDA is inextricably linked to creating and sustaining both a:

- High-quality, high-performing, diverse workforce at all levels within USDA, and
- A workplace environment free from discrimination, harassment, intolerance, and reprisal.

Underlying the accomplishment of USDA’s goals of *service to customers and efficient management* are providing, ensuring, and promoting a **workplace** where **employees** and **applicants** for employment are:

- Treated equitably, fairly, and justly,
- Assured equal opportunity for development and advancement,
- Encouraged and supported to reach their full potential in the performance of meaningful work, and
- Recognized and rewarded for their achievement and the value of their contributions to ensuring USDA customers experience top-quality customer service and equal access to all USDA programs and services.

USDA policy prohibits reprisal, harassment, or discrimination based on

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age• Color• Disability• National origin• Race | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Familial status</i>• <i>Marital status</i>• <i>Political affiliation</i>• <i>Protected genetic information</i>• <i>Religion</i> | <p>And where applicable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Status as a parent</i>• <i>Sex (Gender)</i>• <i>Sexual orientation</i>• <i>Because all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program</i> |
|--|--|---|

USDA is dedicated to strategic, administrative, advocacy, change management, and employee developmental actions taken under the Human Capital Plan that do not adversely affect or disproportionately impact any group of USDA employees or applicants.

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY

Accountability System—Departmentwide system to ensure human capital decisions are strategically aligned, effective, efficient, and guided by the Merit System Principles, Veteran’s Preference, and related public policies

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)—USDA agency that administers programs that facilitate the efficient, fair marketing of U.S. agricultural products, including food, fiber, and specialty crops

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)—The principal in-house research agency of the USDA, charged with extending the Nation’s scientific knowledge with 22 national programs, with research projects in agriculture, nutrition, technology, the environment, and other topics that affect the American people

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—USDA agency that protects America’s animal and plant resources by safeguarding resources from exotic invasive pests and diseases, monitoring and managing agricultural pests and diseases existing in the United States, resolving and managing trade issues related to animal or plant health, and ensuring the humane care and treatment of animals

Civil Rights Impact—Those consequences of policies, actions, and decisions on the civil rights and opportunities of protected groups or classes of individuals who are USDA employees (or applicants) or program beneficiaries

Civil Rights Implications—Information or data that suggest, or from which one may infer, that a policy, action, or decision will affect protected groups or classes, positively or negatively, because of one or more prohibited bases

Conflict Prevention & Resolution Center (CPRC)—USDA organization created in 1998 to help the Department better handle workplace conflict, conflict with farmers and ranchers, and conflict with other agencies

Corporate Standard—The minimum standard for human capital efforts that USDA agencies must reach

Diversity Advisory Council (DAC)—Employee body that provides advice on a variety of workplace issues raised by the USDA employee advisory councils

Farm Security & Rural Investment Act—The May 2002 Act that makes significant changes in farm program structure and funding to help bring much needed stability to the Nation’s farmers and ranchers. Specifically, the Act provides: 1) certainty and a strong safety net for farmers over the next 6 years; 2) record-level support for conservation programs on working farms to preserve wetlands and improve soil and water quality; 3) new support for food stamp and nutrition programs; 4) new tools to support trade expansion for our agricultural products; 5) a new energy title to promote agriculture’s contribution to our energy needs; 6) increased investment in research, value-added programs, animal and plant disease protections, and food safety; and 7) a

wider range of funding and new authorities to improve the economic prospects and quality of life in rural areas, thus expanding authority to finance telecommunications, renewable energy, and business and community projects

Farm Service Agency (FSA)—USDA agency that helps ensure the well-being of U.S. agriculture through efficient and equitable administration of farm commodity programs, farm operating ownership, and emergency loans; conservation and environmental programs; emergency and disaster assistance; domestic and international food assistance, and international export credit programs

Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock for the New Century—Bush Administration policy document that describes the results of scientific research and USDA experience in implementing agricultural policy and sets out policy principles covering such areas as trade, farm assistance, infrastructure, conservation, rural communities, nutrition and food assistance, and program integration

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)—USDA agency responsible for increasing food security and reducing hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and needy families access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)—USDA public health regulatory agency that protects consumers by ensuring that meat, poultry, and egg products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)—USDA agency that opens, expands, and maintains global market opportunities through international trade, cooperation, and sustainable development activities, which ensure long-term economic vitality and global competitiveness of American agriculture

Forest Service (FS)—USDA agency responsible for sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the 191 million acres of national forests and rangelands

Human Capital (HC)—The strategic management and deployment of an organization's human resources

Human Capital Imperatives—The critical human capital management issues on which USDA must focus

Human Capital Planning—The systematic process of assessing the current state of human capital in an organization, designing a vision for the future, and developing goals and strategies to support the organization's business objectives

Human Resources Leadership Council (HRLC)—Human resources body composed of agency and mission area personnel officers for the purpose of discussing common issues and spearheading new initiatives

Individual Development Plans (IDP)—Employee learning and career development tools that outline a roadmap for meeting individual and organizational performance objectives

Inventory Gap Analysis—The process of identifying the current staffing requirements for critical occupational series, projecting the future staffing requirements for these occupations, and developing strategies for addressing those gaps

Knowledge Management/Content Management—Enterprise-wide eGovernment effort to capture retiree and departing employee knowledge, address competency gaps, and promote communities of practice and information sharing

Learning Management System (LMS)—A system to support continuous learning, track training investments, and utilize learning technologies

Mission-Critical Occupations—Occupations that are key to USDA’s success in meeting basic mission requirements

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)—USDA agency that provides useful agricultural statistics on production and supplies of food and fiber prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, and farm aspects of the industry

National Fire Plan—USDA plan that outlines actions to reduce immediate hazards to communities in the wildland-urban interface and to ensure fire management planning and firefighter personnel and resources are prepared for extreme fire conditions in the future

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)—USDA agency responsible for providing national leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve America’s natural resources and environment. NRCS provides leadership for conservation activities on the Nation’s 1.6 billion acres of private and other non-Federal land

Office of Civil Rights (CR)—Departmental Administration office that provides overall leadership, coordination, direction, oversight, and technical assistance within USDA and its programs to ensure fair and equitable treatment of USDA customers and employees consistent with the delivery and enforcement of civil rights programs and activities

Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM)—Departmentwide resource for strategic human resource management issues, OHRM designs and operates programs and activities to attract, hire, develop, retain and advance a diverse, high-performing workforce

Performance Management System—Departmentwide system that sets the parameters within which USDA agencies can design their own performance management programs, including aligning employee and team performance expectations with organizational strategic plans, providing for employee performance evaluation that focuses on results and objective measures of performance, and focusing on two-way communication of performance objectives and accomplishments

Performance Measure— Long-term performance targets to provide perspective on goal attainment and to assess the overall “health” of human capital in the department

Pervasive Human Capital Challenges—Those human capital outcomes which USDA’s Subcabinet executives and other external stakeholders consider to be high priority

Protected Groups or Classes—Any individual or group of individuals protected under Federal law or Executive Order from discrimination based on any prohibited bases

Rural Development (RD)—USDA mission area that helps rural Americans by providing technical assistance and programs that build strong economies and improve the quality of life

Senior Executive Service (SES)—Corps of executives selected for key public sector leadership positions just below top Presidential appointees

Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS)—The Departmentwide program, established by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, to enhance agencies’ ability to attract and retain world-class research scientists

Skills/Competency Gap Analysis—The process of identifying the current skills and competencies existing in the workforce, forecasting the future skills and competencies needed in the workforce, and developing strategies to bridge those gaps

Strategic Planning—The process of developing strategic goals, defining key outcomes, and communicating the intent for action and results, which is grounded in the Department Administration’s policy and management objectives

Succession Planning—The process of identifying and developing a cadre of individuals prepared to succeed to managerial and leadership positions

Tri-Agency Rotational Intern Program—A collaborative student intern program among the USDA, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of the Interior

Workforce Planning—The process of conducting workload and workforce supply and demand analyses in order to project the future size, composition, and competencies needed. This information can be used as a strategic basis for prioritizing resources and making long-term human resources decisions grounded in USDA’s business goals and budgetary constraints

Workforce Restructuring Plan—Major Departmental effort to streamline program delivery and/or administrative structures to improve service delivery